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## Defining in talk-in-interaction: Recipient-design through negative definitional components

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### Abstract

This article examines a recurrent format that speakers use for defining ordinary expressions or technical terms. Drawing on data from four different languages—Flemish, French, German, and Italian—it focuses on definitions in which a *definiendum* is first followed by a negative definitional component ('*definiendum* is not X'), and then by a positive definitional component ('*definiendum* is Y'). The analysis shows that by employing this format, speakers display sensitivity towards a potential meaning of the *definiendum* that recipients could have taken to be valid. By negating this meaning, speakers discard this possible, yet unintended understanding. The format serves three distinct interactional purposes: (a) it is used for argumentation, e.g. in discussions and political debates, (b) it works as a resource for imparting knowledge, e.g. in expert talk and instructions, and (c) it is employed, in ordinary conversation, for securing the addressee's correct understanding of a possibly problematic expression. The findings contribute to our understanding of how epistemic claims and displays relate to the turn-constructive and sequential organization of talk. They also show that the much quoted 'problem of meaning' is, first and foremost, a participant's problem.

Keywords: Definition; Negation; Social interaction; Meaning; Interactional Semantics

### 1. Introduction

In social interaction, speakers sometimes deliver definitions in order to clarify the meaning of an expression they use. In our previous studies of definitions in talk-in-interaction (De Stefani and Sambre, 2016; Deppermann, 2016), we observed that speakers often produce negative statements when providing a definition. Extract (1) is an example:

### Extract 1: FOLK\_E\_00210\_SE\_01\_T\_02\_DF\_01 Ukraine<sup>1</sup>

die **ukraIne** **ist** **kein** **ukraInischer** **staat-** (0.3)  
the *Ukraine* *is* *no* *Ukrainian* *state*  
die **ukraIne** **ist** **ein** **ukrainisch** **RUSsischer** **staat.**  
the *Ukraine* *is* *a* *Ukrainian* *Russian* *state*

Here, “Ukraine” is defined by first denying a possibly inferable meaning with a negation (*ist kein ukrainischer staat*, ‘is not a Ukrainian state’). Then, the positive definition follows (*die ukraine ist ein ukrainisch russischer staat*, ‘the Ukraine is a Ukrainian Russian state’).

In this article, we show that using such negative components in the context of a definition is a recipient-designed practice. Indeed, the negation excludes meaning components that recipients putatively, and sometimes manifestly, have taken to be a valid part of the definition. Hence, speakers tailor their definitions to knowledge and expectations, as well as to epistemic and evaluative stances, which they ascribe to their addressees.

In the following sections, we first introduce an interactional perspective on meaning (section 2) and then report earlier findings about the use of definitions (section 3) and negation (4) in interaction. Subsequently, we describe the phenomenon under scrutiny in its generic structure (section 5) and present our data (6). We devote the main body of the article to the analysis of eight excerpts in which speakers produce definitions with a negative component. The analysis focus on the ways in which the negation takes into account possible understandings of the recipients (section 7). Finally, we will discuss our findings (section 8) and present the perspectives our study opens up for future research on negation and meaning constitution in social interaction (9).

## 2. Approaches to linguistic meaning

In the structuralist tradition, linguistic meaning is regarded as an effect of binary oppositions between linguistic signs, which result in paradigmatic sense relations (de Saussure, 1916). Accordingly, meaning resides in the linguistic system (*langue*), whereas language use (*parole*) only implements pre-established meanings. Cognitive Linguistics, in contrast, holds that meaning is rooted in human cognition and bodily experience (e.g. expressed through metaphor; Lakoff, 1987). It is marked by subjective construal and perspective (Langacker, 1987) and rests on background knowledge, which according to Fillmore (1985) is organized in frames. Based on the insight that lexical items do not have meanings in isolation, the usage-based approach has shown the ways in which syntagmatic relationships (collocations; Firth, 1957) determine linguistic meanings (Sinclair, 1991). According to this view, the frequency of usage patterns leads to cognitive entrenchment, whereas social dissemination leads to conventionalization of meanings (Schmid, 2015).

Usage-based approaches highlight the role of context and of actual instances of use for the emergence of meanings. Yet there is little interest in how interlocutors deploy and understand linguistic expressions in concrete occasions of use (but see Rosaldo, 1972 for an early ethnographic study). This question is addressed by interactional approaches to meaning constitution (Bilmes, 2011, 2015; Deppermann, 2007; Deppermann and Spranz-Fogasy, 2002). These approaches show how local meanings of linguistic expressions are specified through turn-construction and sequential organization that ensure intersubjectivity (Deppermann, 2015; Sidnell, 2014). Interactional approaches to meaning study the

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<sup>1</sup> Transcripts follow the CA conventions established by Jefferson (2004). In the German excerpts, clitics are tied by “\_” to their host items.

metasemantic practices interlocutors deploy to clarify and negotiate locally relevant meanings. They show that contextual features located well beyond the immediate syntactic environment are consequential for meaning constitution, e.g. turn-constructive practices like contrasting (Deppermann, 2005) and generalization (Hauser, 2011), sequential accomplishments like repair (Schegloff et al., 1977) and formulation (Heritage and Watson, 1979), as well as embodied resources such as gestures and object handling. One way in which interactants establish and secure the meaning of their words consists of articulating a definition.

### 3. Definition

Treatments of 'definition' date back to antiquity and may be exemplified by Aristotle's well-known requirement for definitions to state the necessary and sufficient conditions for the use of an expression (Aristotle, 1938). Another view, which is still influential nowadays, is the dictum by St. Thomas Aquinas (1947[1265]: liber I, quaestio 3, articulo 5): "definitio est ex genere et differentia" ['definition is (composed) of a genus (to which the *definiendum* belongs) and (specific) differences', trans. by the authors]. Research has shown, however, that definitions often do not exhibit the properties that, according to logic and philosophy, should hold for prototypical, i.e. stipulative, definitions. Whereas stipulative definitions establish the meaning of (neologistic) scientific terms, definitions of expressions that are already in use prove to be more difficult—if the definition is to explicate the usual meaning of the expression. In particular, the distinction between the expression to be defined (the *definiendum*) and the actual definition of it, stating the properties of its denotata, often proves to be impossible (cf. Martin's [1990] notion of "definition naturelle"). Indeed, in the case of ostensive definition, a pointing gesture to an object or event, which are treated as instances of the *definiendum*, may be sufficient for a definition, even without any descriptive component. In linguistics, this close relationship between semantics and world-knowledge is reflected by the observation that the dividing line between word-meanings and encyclopedic knowledge is often at best fuzzy (Fillmore, 1985). Moreover, definitions can never be fully explicit, but have to rely on unstated background knowledge. Hence, definitions are also affected by irremediable context-dependency, indexicality, and vagueness (Bar-Hillel, 1950; Garfinkel, 1967). A further problem relates to the internal semantic structure of the *definienda*. Rather than conforming to classical Aristotelian categories—which are delimited by necessary and sufficient conditions—family resemblances (Wittgenstein, 1950), prototype effects (Rosch, 1978), fuzzy boundaries, and radial structures of categories (Lakoff, 1987) are common for expressions in natural language. For this reason, definitions are often difficult to distinguish from descriptions of object/event properties or from explications of (locally) intended meanings. Recent empirical research on definitions in social interaction (cf. Greco and Traverso, 2016) has shown that speakers use definitions for different communicative purposes: imparting knowledge, dealing with problems of understanding, and arguing.

In pedagogic contexts, definitions are produced as parts of longer explanations in which imparting knowledge is combined with the introduction of terms that are new to students and/or designate the objects of learning (Fasel Lauzon, 2014; Deppermann, 2016).

Definitions can be used to solve problems of understanding, i.e. misunderstanding, non-understanding, or the disambiguation or specification of intended meanings (Deppermann, 2018). In these cases, definitions can be used in order to clarify incorrect or insecure understandings. A further use of definitions aims to check whether the recipient's understanding of a term is correct (cf. De Stefani, 2005).

Definitions are also used in arguments, especially in order to defend or attack an opinion, or a position in a (public) debate (De Stefani and Sambre, 2016; Doury and Micheli,

2016). This use has become canonical as the topos of ‘argumentation by definition’ (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; Kienpointner, 1992:250–263). In factual argument, interlocutors can infer from a definition that something is true (or not). In pragmatic argument, a definition lets recipients infer that something has to be done (or avoided), e.g. a specific (political) action has to be taken. Argumentative uses are, therefore, often normative, precisely because, by using them, speakers insist on the practical relevance of the definition for choosing the ‘right’ opinion or action.

In sum, studies of definitions in interactional (and also textual) contexts show that definitions are designed for practical purposes, related both to participants’ larger joint projects and also to the defining speaker’s personal goals.

#### 4. Negation in interaction

Negation has mainly been studied in terms of grammatical realization and semantic properties, such as scope and truth-conditional properties. In this respect, morphological negation (e.g. by prefixes, such as *un-*, *de-*, *dis-*) has to be distinguished from lexical negation by negative items, such as negative particles (*not*), prepositions (*without*), and determiners (*no*). Only lexical negation has scope over other syntactic constituents. Pragmatic studies of negation focus on the relationship between lexical negation and presupposition and implicature (Horn, 2001: ch.4) and on the level on which negation operates (e.g. Roitman 2017). Negation can concern the epistemic (propositional), the descriptive or the metalinguistic level (Horn, 2001: ch.5; Blühdorn, 2012: ch.10–12). Verhagen (2005: ch.2) claims that negation presupposes that the negated alternative is contextually relevant. According to him, sentential negation invites the recipient “to consider-and-abandon [...] a positive epistemic stance to [...] conclusions from the previous discourse” (Verhagen, 2005:72). The few existing studies of the use of negation in social interaction support this view. Speakers can use negation in relation to their own talk to “retract overstatements” (Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson, 2005), or to constrain the interpretation of what is said by denying possible, unwanted inferences, which recipients might draw from the speaker’s talk (Deppermann, 2014). Negations of the recipient’s prior talk occur in the context of negative responses to polar interrogatives, disagreements (Ford, 2001, 2002; cf. also Heinemann, 1983:107–132), and third-turn repairs, which correct the interlocutor’s misunderstanding of the speaker’s own prior talk (Schegloff, 1992). Deppermann (2014) therefore claims that negation is recipient-designed: it is used to exclude assumptions from common ground (Clark, 1992, 1996), which the interlocutor possibly or manifestly takes to be true. In our study, we focus on the role of negation in the context of definitions. To our knowledge, this use of negation has not yet been studied.

#### 5. The phenomenon

This article analyzes negations in the context of definitions occurring in various settings of interaction carried out in Flemish, French, German, and Italian. We focus on definitions exhibiting the following order of components: the speaker first uses an expression and then produces a Negative Definitional Component (henceforth: NDC), which lets recipients retrospectively identify the related lexical item as the *Definiendum* (henceforth: D). In a third step, the speaker adds a Positive Definitional Component (henceforth: PDC).

The canonical structure of the cases of definitions we consider is thus:

$$\underbrace{{}_D\text{Expression}_D \text{ is not } X_N, \text{ but } \text{is } Y_P}_{\text{NDC}}$$

NDC and PDC have an antithetic relationship (Mann and Thompson, 1987), i.e. the truth of X is denied and supplanted by Y. In German, the antithetic relation is mostly encoded by the connective *sondern*, which prefaces PDC, whereas French *mais* and Italian *ma/però* are used to express antithesis. In the transcripts below, the three parts of the definition are labeled by the indices <sub>D</sub> (*definiendum*), <sub>N</sub> (NDC) and <sub>P</sub> (PDC) at the beginning and end of each component, e.g.:

*Extract 2: FOLK\_E\_00210\_SE\_01\_T\_02\_DF\_01 Ukraine (with indices)*

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Ddie ukraIneD Nist kein ukraInischer staat-N (0.3)
the Ukraine is no Ukrainian state
die ukraIne Pist ein ukrainisch RUSSischer staat.P
the Ukraine is a Ukrainian Russian state

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Except for one case (ex. 5), the instances we discuss are all same-speaker initiated, i.e. the *definiendum* as well as the NDC and PDC are produced by the same speaker within one turn. We consider the NDC to be an integral part of the definition, rather than ‘just’ an exclusion of unintended inferences, for three reasons: a) speakers produce the negation immediately after the *definiendum* and before the PDC, b) they do not produce NDCs as a parenthesis, and c) the NDC does not end in a transition relevance place (Sacks et al., 1974), but projects turn-continuation through an affirmative statement.

## 6. Data and method

Our study rests on transcribed audio and video corpora of talk-in-interaction. The German data come from the publicly accessible database FOLK (*Forschungs- und Lehrkorpora gesprochenes Deutsch*, dgd.ids-mannheim.de; Schmidt, 2016). The French data stem from dinner table interactions collected in Switzerland as part of the corpus CIEL-F (*Corpus International Écologique de la Langue Française*, www.ciel-f.org), which documents talk-in-interaction in francophone areas throughout the world. For the Italian data we consider two sources, namely dinner table interactions collected in Italy for the corpus ALIAS (*Archivio di LinguA Spontanea*, www.arts.kuleuven.be/ling/alias/) and TV debates on same-sex marriage aired in Italy in 2016. Finally, we analyze a Flemish excerpt taken from a meeting of a mutual-help group for people affected by Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (De Stefani and Sambre, 2016).

As stated in section 5, our sample consists of instances of lexical negation exhibiting the order ‘*definiendum* – NDC – PDC’. In total, we analyzed 27 instances in depth, among which were 16 from German, seven from Italian, three from French and one from Flemish. After having noticed in a prior study (Deppermann, 2016) that negative components are sometimes used in definitions, we decided to systematically search for them in the corpora. Since definitions cannot be retrieved automatically, we looked for occurrences of negative particles (*niet*, *nicht*, (*ne*) *pas*, *non*) and negative articles (e.g. *geen*, *kein/e*, *aucun/e*, *nessun/a*). About five percent of the negations we inspected (800 occurrences) were judged to be instances of negative definitional components. We decided to focus on the most frequent format [<sub>D</sub>Expression<sub>D</sub> <sub>N</sub>is not X<sub>N</sub>, but <sub>P</sub>is Y<sub>P</sub>] found in those occurrences. Other formats encountered in the data were excluded from the sample (e.g. [<sub>D</sub>Expression<sub>D</sub> <sub>N</sub>is not X<sub>N</sub>, because it <sub>P</sub>is Y<sub>P</sub>], [<sub>D</sub>Expression<sub>D</sub> <sub>P</sub>is Y<sub>P</sub>; it <sub>N</sub>is not X<sub>N</sub>], [<sub>D</sub>Expression<sub>D</sub> <sub>P</sub>is a Y<sub>P</sub> <sub>N</sub>without X<sub>N</sub>], etc.).

As regards the languages considered in this article, we did not find language-specific corollaries. Therefore, we do not structure our analysis according to the different languages,

but according to the contexts of use of NDCs which we found in our data. We do not claim that the format we identified is universal, but that it is an available resource for speakers of the languages considered in this article. In order to better illustrate the phenomenon, we use data from a wide range of interaction types, including social interaction from various private, public, and institutional settings, such as talk among friends, broadcast debates, interviews, discussions in a mutual-help group, university vivas, and driving lessons.

The aim of this article is to carve out the recipient-designed dimension of the definitions under scrutiny. Although we will also focus on particular sequential uses and formats of definitions including an NDC, our primary aim is to discover the ways in which the NDC of a definition relates to putatively ascribed recipients' knowledge and epistemic or evaluative stances, and we use Conversation Analysis and Interactional Linguistics to do so.

## 7. Analysis

Providing an NDC is a recipient-designed practice. It builds on knowledge, expectations, and epistemic positions concerning the meaning of the *definiendum* that the speaker producing the definition attributes to their addressee. Negating the validity of such meanings is a way of anchoring the definition in the interlocutor's assumptions. There are several sources for a speaker's assumptions about the addressee's possible unintended understandings, which the speaker aims to inhibit through negation:

- The source of the NDC may be located in the *same speaker's* preceding talk (section 7.1);
- the source of the NDC may be located in the *addressee's* preceding talk (7.2);
- the negated meaning can be attributed to *third parties* (7.3), who may be present or absent, explicitly referred to or left anonymous, explicitly quoted or only alluded to;
- the source of the NDC is not verbalized, but is contextually salient (7.4).

If the source of the NDC has been produced in previous talk, it is noted by the index *s* in the transcript.

### 7.1 NDCs drawing on speaker's preceding talk

The NDC can be motivated by a subject matter that is topically related to the *definiendum* and which has been talked about before. The NDC then serves to contrast the *definiendum* with preceding statements or with previously used expressions bearing some semantic similarity to the *definiendum*. Extract 3 is from an expert interview. The interviewee (ITE) talks about his experience and knowledge as a member of the rockabilly and psychobilly scenes. After having described the dancing style practiced at rockabilly concerts, *jive* (01–07), he contrasts it with the dancing style associated with psychobilly, named *going mental* (20).<sup>2</sup>

*Extract 3: FOLK\_E\_00191\_SE\_01\_T\_02\_DF\_01\_c79-94 going mental*

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<sup>2</sup> Although we understand that extract 3 may be a bit hard to understand for readers who are not familiar with the different dance styles, we chose not to give a dictionary meaning (or another explanation) of these notions. Indeed, the novice reader is in about the same position as the interviewer in the excerpt, whose understanding also has to rely on the semantic work carried out by the interviewee. Therefore, starting from an unknowing position as a reader might even be helpful for getting a clearer idea of what the interviewer's definitional work achieves and what it does not.

01 ITE ich meine auf konzerten bei beim rockabilly is es (.) maximal  
*I mean at concerts with with rockabilly it is at most*

02 dass du anfängst äh rä- srockabilly jive zu tanzen,<sub>s</sub>=  
*that you start to dance rockabilly jive*

03 =also °h wie du s aus filmen kennst?  
*so as you know it from movies*

04 (.) ja?=  
*yes*

05 =so (.) auf highschool[abschluss. ]  
*like at the prom*

06 ITR [sso\_n rich]tiger ji[ve;s]  
*kind of a real jive*

07 ITE [ s\_n\_]richtiger (.) jive.s  
*a real jive*

08 ITE mit (.) allem drehn drüber und hier un (.) ko[mplett oben rum, ]  
*with all turning over and here completely up around*

09 ITR [könnt ich mein vater hinsch]icken.  
*I could send my father there*

10 ITR der war tanzlehre[r. ]  
*he was a dancing teacher*

11 ITE [.hh ja? (0.4)  
*yes*

12 ITE ah des de[s (.) der wird sich freun.]  
*PTCL this this he will be glad*

13 ITR [mh:::?  
 ]

14 ITE (.) der wird sich freun.  
*he will be glad*

15 .h un beim psychobilly is es so dass in der ersten reihe,  
*and with psychobilly it is so that in the first row*

16 man nannte,  
*it was called*

17 es gibt auch ne: mh: auch da ne dokumentation die auf arte lief,=  
*there is also a PTCL also there a documentation which was on Arte<sup>3</sup>*

18 =über den psychobilly un dann auch (.) direkt über pi paul fenech,  
*about the psychobilly and then also directly about P Paul Fenech*

19 .h (.) der erfinder des psychobillys.  
*the inventor of psychobilly*

20 =ä:hm .h (0.3) ((schmatzt)) des going mental.<sub>D</sub>  
*erm ((lip smack)) of going mental*

21 (.) kein mittanzen mehr mit jive,<sub>N</sub>=  
*no more joining in the dance with jive*

22 =sondern so\_n (.) ja nicht pogen.<sub>N</sub>  
*but kinda well not mashing/pogo*

23 das ka man nich sagen;=  
*one can't say this*

24 =das is eher so\_n mitkämpfen in der ersten reihe, wird es tituiert.=  
*it is rather kinda joining the fight in the first row it is called*

25 ITR =so n .h (.) also schon auch härter im tanz.]  
*kind of so PTCL PTCL harder in terms of dancing*

26 ITE [ absolut?  
*absolutely*

27 ITE (.) also das is äh: (.) man is blau un grün we ma mitmacht. (0.3)  
*so this is erm one gets blue and green if you participate*

The interviewee characterizes *going mental* (20), which is associated with psychobilly (15–20), with a double negative contrast: *kein mittanzen mehr mit jive*, ('no more joining in the dance with jive', 21) and *nicht pogen*; ('not mashing/pogo', 22). Fig. 1 schematically represents the local taxonomy that the interviewer constructs here.

<sup>3</sup> *Arte* is the name of a Franco-German tv channel with a focus on culture and fine arts.



Musical style	rockabilly	psychobilly	[punk] <sup>4</sup>
Associated dancing style	jive	<b>going mental</b>	pogen

Figure 1. Emergent local taxonomy in extract 3

*Jive* was discussed earlier at some length (01–07). The interviewer indexed her familiarity with this dance style (06), adding that her father was a dance teacher (09–10). When the interviewee turns to *going mental*, which he presents as the dance style of psychobilly, the interviewer does not show any uptake. The interviewee now uses the common ground which has been established before concerning *jive* to give a definition of *going mental* through a negative contrast with *jive*. He goes on to project a positive antithetic contrast (*sondern so\_n*, ‘but kinda’, 22), which, however, is abandoned in favor of another negative contrast *kein pogen* (‘no pogo/mashing’, 22): while *pogen* was not mentioned before, it can be taken to be a more widely known term than *going mental*.<sup>5</sup> The interviewee indexes that *pogen* is not incorrect, but that it comes close to the meaning of *going mental* while still not equaling it sufficiently. After explicitly expressing its inadequacy for defining *going mental* (23), he provides a tentative PDC: *das is eher so\_n mitkämpfen in der ersten reihe*, ‘it is rather kinda joining the fight in the first row’ (24). This PDC is hedged by indexing its vague and approximative status (*eher so\_n*, ‘rather kinda’) and by a metalinguistic comment (*wird es tituliert*, ‘it is called’, 24). The interviewer checks her understanding of the interviewee’s definitional work by proposing a comparison (*härter im tanz*, ‘harder in terms of dancing’, 25), which again takes the other dance styles as points of reference for defining the meaning of *going mental*.<sup>6</sup> The interviewee confirms this without reserve and adds an account of experiences of being hurt as a consequence of participating in *going mental* (27 and subsequent lines).

The NDCs serve to define *going mental* by contrasting it with other dancing styles, which are salient as an antecedent (*jive*) or are taken to share common ground without having been mentioned before (*pogen*). The definitional activity creates paradigmatic, taxonomic relationships of associations between musical and dancing styles (see Fig. 1; cf. Bilmes, 2011; Hauser, 2011). While the taxonomic superordinate category (music-genre associated dance styles) accounts for the *genus proximum*, the paradigmatic contrast with negative alternatives allows the interviewee to delimit the *definiendum* and root it in shared knowledge. However, the NDCs are not sufficient to define *going mental*. They project additional, positive descriptive work that (at least approximatively) completes the definition.

The definitional work in extract 3 is part of a complex expert account, which allows a speaker with higher epistemic status to impart knowledge to a participant with less knowledge. The definition starts with the NDCs as contrasts, then provides a PDC by way of antithesis and is extended by an account that no longer defines *going mental*, but states some of the prototypical properties associated with its *denotatum* (experiences, consequences). Hence, the established relationships between music categories and their respective dance styles show that the latter are “category-bound activities” (Sacks, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> Not mentioned in the excerpt.

<sup>5</sup> Thus, *nicht pogen* is an instance of a negative definitional component which is contextually salient, because it is assumed to be known to all participants (see section 7.4).

<sup>6</sup> However, it is not clear whether the comparison only relates to *jive* or also to *pogen*.

## 7.2 NDCs rejecting assumptions from addressee's prior talk

The choice of an NDC can be motivated by the prior talk of the addressee, from which the speaker infers that the addressee takes some meaning to be part of the definition of the *definiendum*, which, however, according to the speaker's view, is faulty. In our data, this occurs in pedagogically motivated examinations as well as in argumentative talk. Extract 4 is an example, taken from a university viva in German literature studies. The examiner (EXA) asks the student (STU) to give an example of a 'production-oriented procedure' in literary instruction at school (01–03). The student first explains the goals of production orientation (05–09) and then gives three examples (10–13).

### Extract 4: FOLK0033\_c492-510 produktionsorientiertes verfahren

- 01 EXA .h können sie ein beispiel nennen für ein produktionsorientiertes verfahren?=  
*can you name an example for a production-oriented procedure*
- 02 =mit dessen hilfe die schüler textstrukturen oder textelemente erkennen sollen?=  
*with the help of which pupils should identify text-structures or text-elements*
- 03 =man sagt doch im allgemeinen produktionsorientierung ist gut für die interpretation.  
*they say PTCL in general that production-orientation fosters interpretation*
- 04 STU hm hm, (.)  
*uhum*
- 05 äh man kann (0.4) zum beispiel öh bei nem bei nem produktionsorientierten verfahren.=  
*erm one can for example erm with a with a production-oriented procedure*
- 06 =wie\_s der name schon sagt.=  
*as the name already says*
- 07 =s kommt immer n produkt bei raus.s=ne?  
*it results always in a product right*
- 08 ((lacht)) also man ge  
*((laughs)) so one*
- 09 das ist (.) immer so zu sehen dass schüler wirklich selber texte och schreiben.  
*it is always to see in a way that pupils really write texts themselves*
- 10 =das heißt entweder nen nen alternatives ende .h verfassen.  
*which means either write an an alternative end*
- 11 =oder briefe an (.) gewisse figuren.=.hh ah::: (0.3)  
*or letters to certain figures erm*
- 12 EXA ((schnalzt)) ja?  
*((click of the tongue)) yes*
- 13 STU oder oder (.) [oder tage]buch[einträge oder so was,]  
*or or diary entries or something like that*
- 14 EXA [ja-]  
*yes*
- 15 EXA [ja is aber dann kon]kreter die frage. (0.5)  
*well but is then more concretely the question*
- 16 EXA die definition war übrigens nicht ganz korrekt,=es öh  
*by the way the definition was not quite correct it erm*
- 17 produktionsorientiertes verfahren, heißt es NICH  
*it is not called production-oriented procedure*
- 18 weil unbedingt ein produkt rauskommt.N=  
*because it necessarily results in a product*
- 19 =öh sondern weil die schüler °h quasi literarisch schreiben?  
*erm but because the pupils write quasi literarily*
- 20 STU [hm hm.]  
*uhum*
- 21 EXA [°hh ]aber die frage ist.=  
*but the question is*
- 22 =können sie ein beispiel nennen für eine aufgabe,  
*can you tell me an example for a task*

The examiner explicitly refers to the student's prior turn as a *definition* (16) of *produktionsorientiertes verfahren*, which she assesses as not quite correct. She corrects it by first negating the validity of the student's prior claim: *heißt es NICH weil unbedingt ein produkt*

*rauskommt* ('it is not called production-oriented procedure because it necessarily results in a product', 17–18). The antecedent was the student's explanation: *wie\_s der Name schon sagt. =s kommt immer n produkt bei raus* ('as the name already says, it always results in a product', 06–07).<sup>7</sup> The antithetic replacement of the negated definitional component amounts to a specification of what the student had termed *produkt*: the examiner affirms that pupils write in a quasi-literary fashion (19). This correction can be seen as reproaching the student because her definition lacks the necessary semantic precision and specificity. The student acknowledges the corrective definition with a response token (20).

The definition as a whole is inserted as a parenthesis (16–19) into another action, asking the student for examples of the *definiendum* (15–22). The definition serves to correct the student's theoretical understanding of the concept, which can be seen as a prerequisite for a correct answer. Hence, the definition addresses a misunderstanding that the examiner has discovered in the student's prior talk. It amounts to an authoritative corrective instruction by a participant with higher epistemic status. This non-projected other-correction is warranted by the task structure of university vivas, in which testing students' knowledge of technical terms relating to the subject they are studying is one of the main concerns of the examination. Therefore, public attention to the semantic precision of students' use of terminology in accordance with commonly accepted definitions is a legitimate routine of viva examiners.

In the following excerpt, taken from a dinner table conversation among four friends, what ends up as a definition also builds on assumptions that can be drawn from previous talk. The participants have just discussed their smoking habits and how difficult it is to quit smoking. Xavier (XAV), who is a non-smoker, comes in with an utterance presenting himself as a heavy drinker (*j'bois (.) à outrance*, 'I drink in excess', 01), and subsequently explains that he usually has a beer when coming home from work (05–08).

#### *Extract 5: Lausanne Souper B 88:51–89:32 alcoolisme*

- 01 XAV moi *s*j'bois (.) à outran[ce, c'est génial ]  
     *I drink in excess it's great*
- 02 GRE [non mais moi j'te vois] plus boire du vin.  
     *no but I see you more drinking wine*
- 03 (0.3)
- 04 XAV oui mais ça dépend dans quel (cas;cadre),  
     *yes but it depends on which (case;context)*
- 05 si j'rentre du boulot à six heures et quelques et puis  
     *if I get home from work at six something and then*
- 06 qu'y a une bière fraîche au fri[go,]  
     *there is a fresh beer in the fridge*
- 07 GRE [ah:] ouais  
     *oh yeah*
- 08 XAV surtout à la belle saison y a: j'ai aucun problème avec ça (donc).  
     *especially in the summer months there is I have no problem with this PTCL*
- 09 GRE ah ouais [c'est marrant moi j'te voyais a]ssez vin.  
     *oh yeah it's funny I saw you rather (drinking) wine*
- 10 MAR [°non mais bien sûr°]  
     *no but of course*

<sup>7</sup> The student's statement in 07–08 could also be understood as a pun (which may be indexed by the student's laughter in 08), and not necessarily as an attempt to give a full-fledged definition, as it is instead treated by the examiner in line 17. The examiner's correction thus epitomizes the risk students run when introducing an element of humor in an unsafeguarded manner, because in the context of a university viva every statement can legitimately be treated as an expression of assessable scholarly competence.

11 (1.4)  
 12 MAR non mais <sub>N</sub>boire une bière c'est pas d'l'<sub>D</sub>alcoolisme<sub>DN</sub> hein?  
*no but drinking one beer that's not alcoholism huh*  
 13 (0.2)  
 14 GRE non mais [bon ]  
*no but well*  
 15 XAV [non mais] <sub>P</sub>d'en boire deux puis après encore du vin pendant le repas,<sub>P</sub>  
*no but drinking two of them and then some wine during dinner*  
 16 MAR ((chuckles)) .h:  
 17 GRE <sub>P</sub>ça [tous les jou:rs ]<sub>P</sub>  
*that every day*  
 18 MAR <sub>P</sub>[et puis un litre] de digestif tous les jours.<sub>P</sub>  
*and then a liter of digestive every day*  
 19 XAV ((chuckles))  
 20 (2.0)  
 21 GRE ((click)) e:t oui.  
*well yes*  
 22 (1.7)  
 23 GRE ((click)) (.) oui: en même temps euh::  
*yes at the same time uh*  
 24 (1.2)  
 25 GRE si tu prends les critè:res euh médicaux on est tous alcooliques hein?  
*if you take the medical uh criteria we are all alcoholics huh*  
 26 (1.4)  
 27 MAR b- (.) ben:: c'est deux verres par jour.  
*well that's two glasses a day*  
 28 (0.3)  
 29 GRE °°ouais°°  
*yeah*  
 30 (0.9)  
 31 MAR donc moi j'suis pas alcoolique par exemple.  
*so I'm not an alcoholic for example*

Xavier presents himself as someone who drinks 'in excess' (01), thereby becoming potentially categorizable as a 'heavy drinker'. The evidence he provides for this claim is that he is used to 'drinking one beer after work' (05–08). On the basis of this, Marc (MAR) rejects Xavier's self-ascribed category of 'heavy drinker'. He does so by means of a definition. Differently from what we have seen in the previous excerpts, Marc's definition starts with the *definiens* (*boire une bière*, 'drinking one beer'), whereas the *definiendum* (*alcoolisme*, 'alcoholism') is produced only at the end of his turn (12). Thus, the NDC contains the first mention of the *definiendum*, which has been, at least conceptually, present in prior talk (01). In this way, Marc establishes the term as 'debatable'. Indeed, subsequently two participants, Grégory (GRE) (14) and Xavier (15), initiate turns that display minimal agreement with Marc's negative statement (*non*, 'no') followed by the disagreement token *mais* ('but'). Xavier succeeds in taking the turn and utters a PDC that he relates to 'alcoholism', namely 'drinking two of them and then some wine during dinner' (15), which is extended both by Grégory (*ça tous les jou:rs*, 'that every day', 17) and by Marc, who adds 'and then a liter of digestive every day' (18). The PDC relies on analepsis and on an extensional understanding of what 'alcoholism' is, based on the consumption self- and other-attributed to Xavier. This is done in a humorous and exaggerated manner, as Marc's and Xavier's chuckling (16, 19) shows. In this case, talk about 'alcoholism' emerges incidentally, during an ordinary dinner table discussion, which has no pre-established topical agenda. This is visible in the way participants treat upcoming definitional problems—which they solve chorally and with displays of laughter. Although the definition participates in the argumentation, it is neither normative nor stipulative. Rather, participants negotiate self- and other-categorizations through chorally defining what 'alcoholism' is. Even when an epistemic authority is invoked ('medical criteria', 25), according

to which ‘two glasses a day’ (27) is the criterion that reportedly qualifies a person as an alcoholic, this is treated as relevant for membership categorization—as can be seen in Marc’s response to the reported medical definition (‘so I’m not an alcoholic’, 31)—rather than as a contribution to the true meaning of ‘alcoholism’.

### 7.3 NDCs attributed to misconceptions of third parties

The NDC can be motivated by reference to third parties’ understanding of the expression in question. This understanding may be widespread and therefore taken to be general knowledge, at least in a certain community (cf. Clark, 1996). Because of this, it may not be necessary to explicitly ascribe it to a specific group of people. This is visible in the following excerpt, taken from a discussion among members of a mutual-help group for persons affected by Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS; see De Stefani and Sambre, 2016; De Stefani, forthcoming). Karel (KAR) is arguing that according to him CFS is not a ‘syndrome’, but that it is actually Lyme disease combined with other co-infections.

#### Extract 6: CFS 2165\_2 06:54–07:27 cvs

01 KAR (...) stilaan beginnen der meer en meer en zeker bij die jonge  
*slowly more and more begin and certainly among the young*  
02 artsen beginnen meer en meer in te zien .h dat <sub>D</sub>cvs<sub>D</sub> <sub>N</sub>dat we dat  
*doctors more and more begin understanding .h that CFS that we*  
03 niet moeten benaderen .h als een euh syndroom of ‘k weet niet  
*do not have to approach it .h as a uh syndrome or I don’t know*  
04 wat waar we niet kunnen aan beginnen,<sub>N</sub>  
*what where we can’t do anything about*  
05 KAR .h nee <sub>p</sub>het is <LYME.><sub>p</sub>  
*.h no it is lyme (disease)*  
06 (1.3)  
07 KAR alstublieft,  
*please*  
08 (0.4)  
09 KAR <sub>p</sub>plus euh: plus co-infecties.<sub>p</sub>  
*plus uh plus co-infections*  
10 (0.8)  
11 KAR hé dus de bartonella en ( ) zijn er ook nog een paar bij  
*huh so the bartonella and ( ) there are also a couple of*  
12 (awel) (.) als ge al in de groep allemaal samentelt dan  
*(well) if you just count everyone in the group then*  
13 [komde misschien aan achtennegentig procent [( )]-  
*you reach perhaps ninety-eight percent ( )-*  
14 BER [°ja° [mag ik vragen,  
*yes may I ask*  
15 hebde gij medische studies gedaan?  
*have you done medical studies*  
16 KAR ik heb geen medische [studies ge[daan (.) maar ik ben&  
*I haven’t done any medical studies but I am*  
17 BER [°ja° [okay  
*yes okay*  
18 KAR &nu- ja waarom zegt ge da?  
*now- yes why are you saying that*  
19 (0.5)  
20 BER euh omdat het voor mij is dat heel belangrijk.  
*uh because it is for me it is very important*

Karel introduces his claim by presenting it as an insight that an increasing number of ‘young doctors’ (01–02) are gaining. His claim is endorsed by experts of medical science, who “own” (Sharrock, 1974; see also Foucault, 1997) medical knowledge and therefore are invoked as

epistemic authorities (De Stefani, forthcoming). The fact that he mentions ‘young’ practitioners might allow listeners to infer that they are expected to have a more updated understanding of CFS, based on recent research, which might possibly explain their reported differing views contrasting with more traditional accounts of the disease. Karel then introduces the object of his argument, CFS (02), and immediately adds what CFS is not: a ‘syndrome (...) where we can’t do anything about (it)’ (03–04). Karel hence negates a possible understanding of CFS—which is widely known in this community, namely that CFS is a syndrome, i.e. a cluster of symptoms with unexplained etiology. His utterance is pragmatically incomplete at this point: by invalidating a specific understanding, Karel projects that he is going to deliver an opposing understanding. Indeed, he uses continuative intonation on *beginnen*, (04). What follows is a further expression of negation, which Karel prosodically emphasizes (*nee*, ‘no’, 05), and then a PDC: *het is <LYME.>* (‘it is lyme (disease)’, 05). The *definiendum* is produced as the pronoun *het* (‘it’), which anaphorically refers to the previously mentioned ‘CFS’. The copula *is* links the *definiendum* to the subsequent *definiens*, which at this point is produced with a slower pace and louder voice, as *<LYME.>* (05). The definitional nature of this action emerges from its syntactic and prosodic patterning, as well as from a shift in perspective that Karel accomplishes. Whereas the NDC represents a *we*-perspective (‘we don’t have to approach it’, 02–03), the PDC is impersonal (‘it is’, 05), thereby displaying the normative dimension of Karel’s claim.

The end of Karel’s definition (05) opens up a transition-relevance place (TRP): his turn is indeed syntactically, prosodically, and pragmatically complete and Karel could expect some form of uptake—e.g. a display of (dis-)agreement—from some of the about 30 co-present individuals. But nobody self-selects and a pause occurs (06). Karel thus extends his turn and in doing so sensibly modifies the *definiens*, which is now presented as Lyme disease ‘plus co-infections’ (09). In other words, Karel’s modification of the *definiens* allows him to deal with the lack of response from his co-participants. The semantic content of the *definiens* itself emerges from the practical problems Karel faces here in mobilizing a response.

His extension occasions a new TRP, but again no one self-selects and a further pause occurs (10). This time, Karel extends his turn by providing an example of the ‘co-infections’ he has just mentioned, i.e. the name of a specific bacterium, *bartonella* (11). While exemplifications are not part of definitions per se, they are typically produced in the service of definitions (e.g. in dictionaries); see Bilmes (2015: ch.3–4). Karel then backs up his claim by suggesting that 98% of the co-present participants would test positive for Lyme disease (12–13), although they have officially been diagnosed with CFS. It is only at this point that Bert (BER) responds to Karel’s arguments, asking him whether he has ‘done medical studies’ (15). By asking this question, Bert calls into question Karel’s epistemic authority in medical matters. Indeed, Karel denies having a medical background (16), thereby dismissing his right to articulate definitions of what CFS ‘is’. By doing so, Bert reifies the idea according to which only specific members (i.e. medical experts) “own” (Sharrock, 1974) technical knowledge. Based on this, ‘non-specialists’ can be denied the right to display such knowledge, even if they use technical terms (such as *bartonella*; Gülich, 2003).

Political debates provide a further setting in which expressions are defined for argumentative purposes. This is visible in the following excerpt, taken from an Italian televised debate about same-sex marriage. It was broadcast in January 2016 (as part of a show called *Omnibus* on the Italian TV-channel *La7*), a few days after the so-called ‘Family Day’ (a demonstration promoting the idea that legal recognition of a family should only be possible among people of different sex) had taken place in Rome. The philosopher Umberto Galimberti (GAL) is intervening in the discussion from a remote studio, supporting same-sex marriage:

Extract 7 Omnibus 31/01/2016 11:22-12:36 figli

01 GAL ((...)) e i bambini hanno bisogno di amore non necessariamente .h di  
*and children are in need of love not necessarily .h of*  
02 differenze sessuali che la smettano di dire che la famiglia è fatta di un  
*sexual differences let's stop saying that the family is made of a*  
03 uomo e d'una donna.  
*man and a woman*  
04 .h perché questa è una visione fondamentalmente materialista,=  
*.h because this is a fundamentally materialist vision*  
05 ??? =(chuck[les])  
06 GAL [difesa dai cattolici che parlano sempre di spirito,  
*defended by the catholics who always speak of the spirit*  
07 .h perché se il criterio dell- dello star insieme è semplicemente  
*.h because if the criterion of- of being together is simply*  
08 quello di metter al mondo i figli,  
*the one to put children in the world*  
09 .h allora è il materialismo più bieco questo.  
*.h then this is the most miserable materialism*  
10 [.h  
11 ??? [.h  
12 GAL mentre: eh lo star insieme ha anche il significato  
*whereas uh being together has also the meaning*  
13 .h d(h)i vo(h)lersi bene: di: dedicarsi (.) a un'opera educativa,  
*.h of caring for each other of devoting oneself to an educational work*  
14 .h perché li figli sono figli non perché (0.5) vai a letto con una donna e  
*.h because the children are children not because you go to bed with a woman and*  
15 una donna va a letto con un uomo.  
*a woman goes to bed with a man*  
16 sono figli perché li cresci.  
*they are children because you raise them*  
17 (0.3)  
18 GAL .h perché gli stai insieme perché rispondi alle loro domande.  
*.h because you stay together because you answer their questions*  
19 .h perché stai attento ai loro bisogni.  
*.h because you take care of their needs*  
20 questo significa paternità e maternità.  
*this means paternity and maternity*  
21 .h da chiunque sia svolta.  
*.h by whomsoever it is carried out*

Galimberti produces the definition after having presented his arguments for about two minutes. The definition starts with *figli*—which in this context translates as ‘children’—and which will be treated as a *definiendum*. Galimberti explains why ‘children are children’ (14): he first negates a possible ‘procreational’ understanding of the concept, namely that children are such because a man and a woman go to bed together (14–15), which he seems to attribute to ‘the Catholics’ (06). Immediately after this, he produces the PDC: ‘children’ are individuals you ‘raise’ (16), with whom you ‘stay together’ (18), whose questions you answer (18), and whose needs you take care of (19). Galimberti rhetorically highlights the opposition between NDC and the PDCs by using the same syntactic resource (cf. Atkinson, 1984:73–82), namely the copula *sono*, ‘they are’, followed by the conjunction *perché*, ‘because’ (*sono figli non perché*, ‘they are children not because’, 14, versus *sono figli perché*, ‘they are children because’, 16). Although Galimberti is suggesting a specific understanding of *figli*, ‘children’, he is not invalidating the idea that children can be the outcome of sexual reproduction. Rather, the speaker here hierarchically orders the conditions that have to be fulfilled in order to identify someone as a ‘child’. By defining the essential traits of a child on the basis of the personal relationship with the parents, Galimberti treats direct, biological descent as optional. This

definition is thus in the service of his argumentation in favor of same-sex marriage, including the right to adopt children. This is also visible in the conclusion of his statement, where he reframes his definition of what ‘children’ are as implying the definition of ‘paternity and maternity by whomsoever it is carried out’ (20–21).

In both excerpts analyzed in this section definitions are employed for argumentative purposes—a use that the literature has observed (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, [1958] 1983:282–288), but only rarely described on the basis of empirical data (but see Micheli, 2010; Doury and Micheli, 2016). Defining in these contexts is a way of publicly taking sides and taking a position. Moreover, by defining, participants ‘appropriate’ (Liedtke et al., 1991) an expression for their argumentative purposes at hand. In such settings, defining thus acquires a political dimension.

Extract 8 is taken from a driving lesson. The instructor (INS) explains the car controls to the student (STU), who is sitting in the driver’s seat for the first time. The instructor describes the use of the switch activating the car’s headlights.

*Extract 8: FAHR\_02\_A05\_31.16-31.40 Abblendlicht<sup>8</sup>*

01 INS eine stufe wei:ter,  
one step further  
02 (0.2)+(0.3)+  
stu +turns switch+  
03 INS is dann des ab (.) blend (.) lischt.<sub>D</sub>  
then is the low beam light  
04 STU hmmhm.  
uhum  
05 INS (hör isch immer) viele sagen immer <abendlicht.>  
(I always hear) many always say evening light  
06 STU ((laughs))  
07 INS des hat aber mit abend nix zu tun<sub>N</sub>  
this hasn’t got anything to do with evening  
08 sondern des heißt ab (.) blend (.) licht, (.)  
but it’s called low beam light  
09 ja?=und des is des licht was de anmachen musst  
right? and this is the light you have to turn on  
10 im dunkeln tunnel regen schneefall::: (.) dämmerung, (0.5)  
in the dark tunnel rain snowfall dusk  
11 und so weiter und so fort,<sub>P</sub>  
and so on and so forth  
12 h also immer dran denken,  
so always think.<sub>INF</sub> of it  
13 INS wenn du an dem (.) dings da drehst an dem schalter, (.)  
if you turn this thing there this switch  
14 INS ein%mal,  
once  
ins %hand turns to the right%...  
15 INS zweimal.%  
twice  
ins %hand turns to the right%

---

<sup>8</sup> Embodied actions are transcribed following Mondada (2018):

- % % Descriptions of embodied actions are delimited between two identical symbols and synchronized with corresponding stretches of talk/silences.
- ..... Preparation of an action
- ,,,,, Retraction of an action
- ins Participant who performs the embodied action



16 STU (0.2)% okay.  
                                   *Okay*  
 Ins     ,,,,,%

The instructor begins the topical sequence by asking the student to turn the headlight switch to the next position (01–02). The definition of the expression to be introduced, *Abblendlicht* ('low beam light'), is anchored by ostension. The instructor highlights the *definiendum* as a new and important term by segmenting it into its constituent syllables: *ab* (.) *blend* (.) *lischt* (03). The student receipts it with an acknowledgement token *?hmhm* (04). The instructor then contrasts the newly introduced term *Abblendlicht* with a similar sounding expression: *Abendlicht* ('evening light', 05–08), which is attributed to anonymous third parties (*viele sagen*, 'many say') as an incorrect understanding of *Abblendlicht*. Although the word-play has a humorous quality, which the student appreciates by laughing (06), the main objective of the contrast is to negate a possible misconception of when the low beam is to be used, namely (only) in the evening. This becomes clear through the antithetic replacement of the NDC (07) with the following list enumerating situations in which the low beam should be used (*im dunkeln tunnel regen schneefall::: (.) dämmerung*, 'in the dark tunnel rain snowfall dusk', 10). Interestingly, this list does not include *Abend* ('evening'), although it would have been correct as well.

The definition in extract 8 consists of three components: the *definiendum* is ostensively introduced by the handling of the switch, which brings about the object of the definition (01–02, and again in the closure of the explanation in 13–15); the NDC rejects a common misconception of the term's meaning (05–08), which therefore the student could have also entertained, and the PDC corresponds to the classical definitional strategy of providing the *genus proximum* ('the light which you have to use') and the *differentiae specifica* (the situations in which the *definiendum* has to be used, 09–11). The instructor designs her definition pedagogically in several ways: by letting the student turn the switch into the relevant position, prosodically highlighting the expression to be defined, monitoring the student's understanding displays, and gesturally enacting actions, as well as through repetition (cf. Svennevig, 2018).

#### 7.4 NDCs building on contextual salience

NDCs can be derived from salient features of the context qualifying as possibly relevant for the expression to be defined. These can be visually available properties of the spatial surroundings or praxeological features of actions that are still ongoing or have been performed in the recent past. In other words, the negation can concern all sorts of possible meanings, which can be taken to share common ground, without necessarily being mentioned.

In extract 9, the salient common ground is provided by the joint project of redecorating a room and the objects involved in this action. Pauline (PAU) and Tamara (TAM) are painting a wall with wall-paint. During this activity, the younger sister Tamara asks her older sister Pauline if one can also paint doors (01).

*Extract 9: FOLK\_E\_00217\_SE\_01\_T\_02\_DF01\_c1372-1380 gestrichene Türen*

01 TAM ka\_ma eigentlich auch (.) türen streichen,  
                                   *can you actually also paint doors*  
 02 PAU ((schmatzt)) .hh ka\_ma,  
                                   *((lipsmack)) you can but actually*  
 03     aber eigentlich also es kommt drauf an was man für türn hat,  
                                   *well it depends on the kind of doors*

04     gibt auch (.) gestrichene türen.<sub>D</sub>  
           *there are also painted doors*  
 05     die sin aber halt dann net mit mit wandfarbe.<sub>N</sub>  
           *but they are PTCL not with with wall paint*  
 06     sondern die sin lackiert in der regel.<sub>P</sub>  
           *they are lacquered usually*  
 07 TAM (0.3) ach so,  
           *I see*  
 08 PAU (0.5) aber des is auch gestrichen,  
           *but this is also painted*  
 09     (1.0) halt mit lack gestrichen.  
           *PTCL painted with lacquer*

Pauline confirms that doors can be painted. She hastens to add an explanation, which amounts to a definition of the phrase *gestrichene türen* ('painted doors', 04). She first negates a possible understanding of this phrase, which is contextually salient because of the ongoing practical action, and which could therefore have been a presupposition of Tamara's question: that 'painted' means 'painted with wall-paint' (05). The definition is produced as an account for why a straightforward answer to the question is not possible, because it modifies the terms of the question. The PDC provides an alternative, which is paradigmatically related to the negated possible meaning component, namely, *lackiert* ('lacquered', 06).<sup>9</sup> Tamara responds with the change-of-state token *ach so* ('I see'; Golato and Betz, 2008), thereby showing that she did not expect doors to be lacquered. This seems to support Pauline's assumption about her sister's understanding, namely that she expected painted doors to be painted with wall-paint. It thus confirms the usefulness of Pauline's expansion of her answer by way of her definition of 'painted doors'. In 08–09, Pauline repeats the contrastive semantic aspect. After the extract, Pauline continues to talk about her experiences with painted doors.

The definition responds to an information-seeking question and is produced by the participant with the higher epistemic status. It is the older sister Pauline who is guiding Tamara throughout the joint redecoration project, instructing, controlling, and correcting the actions of her younger sister. The NDC anticipates a misunderstanding of the expression 'painted doors' and more generally of the action of painting doors, which is probable because of the contextual salience of using wall-paint. The definition thus does corrective work, not as in section 7.2 concerning an overt claim of the addressee, but rather concerning a presupposition Pauline can be seen to have made in her talk.

In the last excerpt of this article, taken from a dinner conversation among students in Milan, three friends are sitting at a kitchen table, while a fourth person (the host) is preparing dinner, standing next to them. Giulio (GIU) has just started telling the others that he will go on vacation with a bunch of friends on a sailing boat. He explains why they decided to take a boat.

*Extract 10 Mi13CE1-37, 03:31-03:58 vacanza itinerante*

01 GIU andiamo in barca^a vela, (.) si chiama brontolo,  
           *we're going by sailing boat (.) it's called grumpy*  
 02     (0.7)  
 03 GIU la barca,  
           *the boat*  
 04     (0.7)  
 05 GIU >non abbiam deciso noi^il nome.<  
           *we haven't decided ourselves^the name.*

---

<sup>9</sup> Of course, the past participle *lackiert* is not a paradigmatic alternative to the prepositional phrase *mit wandfarbe* in terms of parts of speech, but only in terms of its semantics.

06 .h perché po- no- fondamentalmente cos'era v- la cosa  
because fundamentally what was the thing  
07 noi cercavamo (.) un::a <sub>D</sub>vacanza itinerante<sub>D</sub> no?  
we were looking for (.) itinerant holidays right  
08 (0.3)  
09 GIU cioè che <sub>N</sub>non non:: non stare in un posto<sub>N</sub> <sub>P</sub>volevamo spostarci<sub>P</sub> (.)  
that is that not not not staying in one place we wanted to move around  
10 solo che (.) il camper costa una cifra.=  
it's just that (.) the caravan costs a lot of money  
11 ELE =hm  
12 (1.4)  
13 GIU interrail costa una cifra e non è molto comodo e^è uno sbatto  
interrail costs a lot of money and is not very comfortable and it is  
14 da organizzare^e nessuno ha molto tempo per fare le cose.  
stressful to organize and no one has a lot of time to do the things

At a certain point of his narrative, Giulio utters the common Italian expression *vacanza itinerante* (translated as 'itinerant holidays', 10). This expression is preceded by a pause and a lengthening of the [n]-sound in the indefinite article *un::a*, which exhibits a production-problem.<sup>10</sup> Subsequently, Giulio provides a definition of *vacanza itinerante*: he first negates a possible understanding (*non stare in un posto*, 'not staying in one place') and then provides the intended meaning (*volevamo spostarci*, 'we wanted to move around', 09). We observe a change in perspective between the NDC and the PDC, in this case from impersonal (*non stare*, 'not staying') to personal (*volevamo*, 'we wanted'), where 'we' refers to the group of friends with whom Giulio is planning to take the trip, and is followed by a verb of volition. He thus presents 'itinerant holidays' as trips in which a group of friends moves from one place to the next—rather than as a vacation in which they would be based in one place and take short trips from there. Hence, what Giulio actually defines is the way in which a *vacanza itinerante* differs from the generic understanding of 'holidays', i.e. its *differentia specifica*. He does so in a way that gives recipients the opportunity to respond, by using the token *no?* ('right') just after mentioning what will end up being the *definiendum* (07). This opportunity is not taken (08) and Giulio extends his turn with *cioè* ('that is', 09), which projects an explanation that will eventually be recognizable as definitional. Here, the NDC and the PDC are introduced as a parenthetical explanation, after which Giulio resumes his narrative (10).

## 8. Discussion

In this article, we have analyzed a definitional practice that we have found to be used across four Germanic and Romance languages. The pervasiveness of definitions in which a *definiendum* is first followed by an NDC and subsequently by a PDC is noticeable.<sup>11</sup> The analysis has shown that such definitions emerge progressively in a context-sensitive way. As their turn-at-talk unfolds, speakers can treat any expression—a technical term, a colloquial word, a phrase, etc.—as warranting definition. The NDC is pivotal for the online-production of the definition. It retrospectively allows addressees to identify the object of the definition (the *definiendum*), and it projects that the speaker is going to produce a PDC. The NDC is essential because speakers use it to display that they are making an assumption about their

<sup>10</sup> We argue that the lengthening of [n] displays the speaker's hesitation in choosing between the male ("un") and the female ("una") definite article.

<sup>11</sup> Among the languages studied, only German has developed a specific antithetic conjunction that speakers use when introducing the affirmed definitional component, i.e. the conjunction *sondern* (see ex. 3, 4, 8, 9), whereas they do not use the contrastive conjunction *aber* ('but'). In the Italian excerpts (ex. 7, 10) no conjunction is used, whereas in the Dutch excerpt the speaker articulates the negation token *nee* ('no') before producing the affirmed definitional component. The French excerpt exhibits the contrastive conjunction *mais* ('but', ex. 5).

addressee's putative understanding of their talk, while at the same time impeding such an understanding. As we have shown, such assumptions may be grounded in common knowledge about what an expression 'usually' or 'expectably' means (ex. 5, 7, 9, 10), or grounded in unequal epistemic stances endorsed by the participants (ex. 3, 4, 8). It is precisely the epistemic status that may be evoked in order to disagree with a proposed definition, especially in argumentative settings (ex. 6, 7). Since the definitions analyzed in this article are both recipient-designed and interactionally situated, they are not stipulative and often do not purport to give a context-free meaning of the expression in question. NDCs sometimes do not deny the truth value of a possible meaning: for instance, by saying that 'children' are children 'not because a man goes to bed with a woman' (ex. 7), Galimberti negates the relevance of this specific understanding for his argumentative purposes—rather than negating the fact that children can be conceived in that way. Negation, in this context, is thus not a logical operation. It recalls the Platonic position that negation does not establish the conceptual contrary but a diversity (Plato, *Sophist* 257b). By negating what is putatively true, relevant, etc. for other parties, speakers promote an understanding that serves their own purposes.

Definitions are indexical, fragmentary, and produced for all practical purposes: on the one hand, they necessarily rely on implicit shared knowledge, on the other hand, they are aspectual: they promote one specific understanding, which is relevant for the interaction at hand. In accordance with this observation, we have shown that speakers accomplish three different, yet, on occasion, overlapping actions, by using the definitional format discussed here: a) they may define an expression for argumentative purposes—both in ordinary interaction among friends (ex. 5) and in politically oriented debates (ex. 6, 7); b) they may impart knowledge to an addressee who displays and/or is treated as being less knowledgeable on a topic—hence its presence in expert interviews (ex. 3) and in oral university examinations (ex. 4); and c) they may deal with a possibly emerging problem of understanding—as we have documented on the basis of two excerpts taken from ordinary interaction among friends (ex. 9, 10). On occasion, these dimensions are overlapping, as in ex. 8, where the driving instructor imparts knowledge to the student while at the same time securing their correct understanding of the newly introduced term.

## 9. Conclusion

Our analysis shows that defining-in-interaction is a highly contingent, situated, and recipient-oriented practice. Speakers define expressions in order to manage assumed or exhibited asymmetries in knowledge, to solve problems of understanding and to support argumentative positions. Definitions often do more than just clarify (intended) meanings. They are argumentative means used to persuade the recipients to adopt the speaker's worldview and position on a matter. This is particularly the case if *definienda* are disputed in the interaction itself or in larger societal discourses. We have based our evidence on a format, observed in four different languages, with which speakers first introduce an expression, then add an NDC, which projects a PDC. Unquestionably, speakers also produce definitions using other formats, which we have not discussed in this contribution. Whereas the format analyzed here has proved to be related to specific communicative purposes, it may very well be that other formats of definitions are used for implementing other kinds of actions. Moreover, speakers of other (not Indo-European) languages may use distinct formats. Further investigation is needed to identify and describe both language-specific resources for definition, as well as cross-linguistically observable practices.

This also holds true for the study of negation—a research area which has only scarcely

been addressed in research on social interaction. Supporting findings from prior studies on negation (e.g. Deppermann, 2014; Ford, 2001, 2002; Schegloff, 1992), our analysis suggests that recipient-design is one of the prime motivations of using negation in talk. Negation appears to be a vital resource for securing understanding, because it allows speakers to take into account the attested or putative understandings, assumptions, expectations, etc. of addressees that could lead to obstacles in the accomplishment of intersubjectivity. By immediately displaying the possibility of unintended meanings and by discarding them at the same time, negation allows speakers to locate the meaning of their turns at talk in a matrix of possible meanings. Studying in which ways other uses of negation are recipient-designed in indexing speakers' assumptions about their interlocutors appears to be a promising line of future research.

Both definition and negation are key phenomena of the constitution and negotiation of meaning in talk. Hence, this article contributes to research in Interactional Linguistics and in Conversation Analysis by promoting the study of what has been termed *Interactional Semantics* (Deppermann, 2011, 2018; Greco and Traverso, 2016)—a notion that sparks both fascination and trepidation among ethnomethodologically oriented researchers, epitomized in Maynard (2011:199) labeling it a “provocative topic.” However, in studying *definitions* in interactional contexts, we have shown that the ‘problem of meaning’—which has been addressed by many anthropologists, philosophers, sociologists, and linguists, among others—is sometimes also a practical problem for the interactants. Implementing the format discussed in this article is just one way in which interactants, on a very local level, work towards solving that problem in a situated, contingent, and recipient-oriented way.

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